



DRB Memorandum Kelley's Corner Draft Design Guidelines

Date of DRB Review of the April 2015 draft of design guidelines for Kelley's Corner: 05-27-2015

Guidelines prepared by The Cecil Group for the Town of Acton

The overall reaction of the members of the board upon review of the draft guidelines is that the document reads as if it could be written for any community in Massachusetts. Though there is a comment in the introduction about referencing certain existing Acton buildings as examples of an appropriate model to follow when conceiving a new or renovation of building, there is no portion of the document that appears to do so. The members of the board are surprised and concerned that the guidelines do not provide examples for what is to be considered as good local buildings to draw inspiration from.

Further, statements are made that Kelley's Corner is a mix of historic property and contemporary commercial design, and that this mix is suggested as appropriate to be continued with respect to styles for new building development. The guidelines seem to leave building design options wide open with the expectation that a future proponent for a project will do the right thing and retain professional design services to appropriately conceive of a project image. Given the recent outcome of development work in Kelley's Corner, the members of the board are concerned that the design guidelines, as drafted, may not significantly assist with directing a proponent's project design, without a robust review process by the town of Acton.

Oddly, though the design guidelines, as drafted, state that all styles of commercial building types are welcome, the guidelines are very clear that single story buildings shall have a pitched roof line. An argument can be made that there are many examples of well-designed commercial buildings, historic and contemporary, capped by a flat cornice or roof line. Why is this not an acceptable building style for new single story developments within Kelley's Corner? The pitched roof directive is concerning as written as it likely will continue to provide for the unintended consequence of large expanses of shallow gabled roof tops, out of proportion with the aesthetic that is expected of a gable or hip style in the traditional sense.

The guidelines utilize the word "should" in many statements on appropriate design. "Large expanses of roof should be interrupted by a variation of roof form." It would seem appropriate for certain statements on design to be more definitive. For example, large expanses of roof will be interrupted by variations of roof form. We recommend the incorporation of further language to describe appropriate proportional use of pitched roof lines.

Other examples of guidelines that are less likely to be followed due to the use of the word should are: "Building massing and orientation should address and define the edges of adjacent streets and public spaces." "Buildings should be set relatively close to the sidewalk, with no parking between the sidewalk and the front façade." The DRB members believe that zoning rules must be written that will reinforce and more directly define these statements made within the guidelines.

Much of the written design guidelines concerning façade composition and components read well. The examples diagrammed are helpful. The sections on signage and site improvements read logically.

The members took note of how sections on site furnishings, landscape materials, light posts, and retaining wall structures are written in decidedly more specific and restrictive language than the section on building design. It is noted the examples cited for the various site furnishings are consistent with the recommended selections for the public way street edge design. The recommendations for these do seem appropriate as material and image consistent with the character desired by many for the town of Acton. However, given contemporary commercial design of buildings is suggested as an appropriate design approach within Kelley's Corner, the DRB members wonder why this attitude does not carry through consistently for related site amenities and furnishings scheduled to be located on interior portions of a privately developed parcel.

The DRB appreciates the opportunity to present commentary on the draft design guidelines for Kelley's Corner.

Respectfully Submitted,

Design Review Board

Members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph, Peter Darlow, Michael Dube. Janet Adachi, BOS liaison.